

Officials upset with Navy's delay in cleaning up hazardous wastes

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JACKSONVILLE — Delays in the cleanup of several hazardous waste sites at the Jacksonville Naval Air Station have brought criticism from members of the St. Johns River Water Management District.

Board members say they agreed at a meeting last week to write to Florida's congressional delegation to complain about what they see as a lack of interest, and about the small amount of federal funds available to clean up hazardous wastes at the military base.

Ralph Simmons, board chairman from Fernandina Beach, said Wednesday the letter would be delayed until district officials meet with the Navy later this month.

"I don't see how they (Congress) can pass all these laws to regulate industry, and then they turn around and ignore them themselves," said Jim Swann of Cocoa, vice chairman of the board.

Most of the hazardous wastes at the base come from the Naval Aviation Depot, where solvents are used to strip paint from aircraft.

Officials believe there are four or five waste sites on the base that need to be cleaned up.

Board members said their primary concern is that solvents and heavy metal waste generated at the Jacksonville Naval Air Station (NAS) is not properly treated before being discharged into the St. Johns River.

About \$4-million in state and city funds have been allocated to clean up the river.

"The problem we're wrestling with is you've got a

state agency wanting to clean up the river, and the federal government is dumping metals into it. It's a great concern," said Sam Swett, a board member from Jacksonville.

Officials at Jacksonville NAS admit there have been delays, but said the delays haven't been deliberate.

Bill Roche, environmental protection director at the naval air station, said the Navy wants the river cleaned up as quickly as the water management district does.

"We are 100 percent concerned about the river. . . . We're doing it as quickly as possible with the taxpayers' money," he said. "We're making progress."

Hazardous wastes cleanup, he said, is a time-consuming process. Studies have to be done to determine the extent of the contamination before cleanup can be started, and the Navy then has to await funds from Congress, he said.

The Navy came under fire last month when it appeared before the district's board to renew its consumptive use permit for water, and members expressed concerns about the hazardous wastes.

The Navy was cited in July by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for hazardous waste violations. It is also violating hazardous wastes rules from the state Department of Environmental Regulation.

Water quality tests conducted by the EPA from April 1986 through June showed high amounts of fecal materials, lead, nickel, cyanides, chromium, oil and grease in the St. Johns River.